

# Beethoven and Bridgetower

'Once more, my dear fellow!'



Ludwig van Beethoven ©The British Library

George Bridgetower, the young violin prodigy, began performing in public in 1787 at the age of nine. He quickly captured the hearts and minds of music-lovers across Europe, and was adopted by the Prince Regent in 1791, when he was only twelve years old.

In 1803, Bridgetower attracted the attention of the great composer, Beethoven. After seeing Bridgetower play in a concert, Beethoven was very impressed by his performance, calling him 'a very able virtuoso and an absolute master of his instrument.' He decided to dedicate his next composition, the Sonata for Pianoforte and Violin in A, to Bridgetower.

Beethoven didn't finish the sonata until the very last moment and he was still making changes to the music during the first performance. At one point in the concert, Bridgetower even improvised a section of the music, which impressed Beethoven so greatly that he got up from his piano and embraced Bridgetower on stage, saying 'Noch einmal, mein lieber Bursch!' ('Once

more, my dear fellow!'). As a token of his gratitude, Beethoven presented Bridgetower with the gift of a tuning fork after the concert.

Despite the rush to finish, the sonata was widely acclaimed. It is hard to imagine now, but at the time, the violin was seen as a folk instrument, suitable only for playing simple, popular tunes. Beethoven's use of this instrument in a more formal piece of music may show that Bridgetower influenced him. It was certainly a radical step, which surprised and excited many people.

Nowadays, we know Bridgetower's sonata as the *Kreutzer Sonata*. This is because shortly after the first performance Beethoven and Bridgetower had a spectacular row. It is not quite known what it was about – although it is thought that Bridgetower insulted a woman with whom Beethoven was in love – but we know the result: Beethoven never spoke to Bridgetower again and renamed the sonata after another prominent violinist of the time, Rudolphe Kreutzer.

Although Kreutzer never played the Sonata, declaring that he found it 'impossible', the name stuck. George Bridgetower is barely remembered today and this is perhaps one of the major reasons.

## Glossary

<b>Virtuoso</b>	A musician who has an exceptional grasp of their instrument.
<b>Sonata</b>	A piece of music composed for the piano, sometimes accompanied by another instrument.
<b>Improvised</b>	Continued playing without the written music, making up the tune as he went along.

# • • • Beethoven and Bridgetower Activity Sheet



## Hot-Seating (in the style of *Question Time*)



Can you resolve Beethoven and Bridgetower's problems? Or perhaps you'll just make them worse!

1. Watch the clip of *Question Time*. Note carefully how the Chair (David Dimbleby), the panelists and audience behave.
2. Nominate members of the class to play David Dimbleby and your own discussion panel. Personalities for the panelists may include current or historical characters, such as a well known radio DJ, the Minister for the Arts, a music journalist, or a representative of the Royal Society of Musicians during Bridgetower's time.
3. Everyone else is the audience, who must ask questions of the panelists about Beethoven and Bridgetower, while the Chair tries to keep order. For example, was Beethoven wrong to change the name of the Sonata? Should people be able to own music? Why? If you were Bridgetower, what would you have done?

## Drawing to Music



1. Listen to the *Kreutzer Sonata* with a soft pencil and some paper in front of you. While the music is playing, allow your hand to move in time, using pattern, line, shade and tone to interpret it. Do your marks change at different

parts of the Sonata? You may need to use several pieces of paper.

2. Try altering this exercise to explore different ways of responding to it:
  - Have different colours available
  - Draw with your eyes closed
  - Make a collage to the music, using a range of materials of different textures
3. Discuss as a class what images, ideas and emotions were suggested by the music. Did everyone have the same impression?

## Use your Talents!



Are you inspired by the *Kreutzer Sonata*?

The composer, Julian Joseph, was so inspired by the story of Bridgetower, Beethoven and the *Kreutzer Sonata*, that he wrote a new opera about it. You can watch his interview at the website.

Listen to the *Kreutzer Sonata* a couple of times and decide what art-form you would most like to use to respond to it. For example, you could:

- Write a poem or story
- Choreograph a dance
- Create a painting or sculpture
- Make a film
- Produce a piece of drama
- Write lyrics to the music

Think about whether you would like to work alone, in a pair or in a group. Why not hold a group exhibition or performance to showcase your work. Look carefully at how other people chose to represent the *Kreutzer Sonata*. Did they see it differently to you?

## Beethoven Web Treasure Trail



Use the sheet on the back of this lesson card *The Beethoven Web Treasure Trail* to find out more about Beethoven's life. Don't forget there are many answers to some of the questions, so share your findings with the class at the end of the lesson.